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ABSTRACT

Finnish and Swedish dialogues by bilingual Swedish Finnish children were contrasted with dialogues by their monolingual peers. Two specific discourse features were investigated: the use and distribution of various politeness strategies and the use of downgraders. The material consisted of 12 second language dialogues in Finnish between the Finnish Swedish school children and 6 conversations in Swedish between them and their Swedish counterparts. Participants, who all knew each other, were asked to solve a potential conflict by discussing the matter with each other. The study of politeness strategies revealed great differences between the Finnish and Swedish discourse of the Finnish Swedish subjects, with the Finnish dialogues dominated by positive politeness strategies. The contrastive analysis of the use of downgraders showed also that the most striking differences between the three groups were those of the Swedish Finnish children's conversations in Finnish and Swedish. The results supported Holmes' theory on the connection between negative politeness and downgraders. (LB)

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A CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS OF THE SPOKEN DISCOURSE OF BILINGUAL SWEDISH FINNISH AND NATIVE SWEDISH SCHOOL CHILDREN

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Introduction

The aim of the present study is to contrast discourse in Finnish and Swedish dialogues by bilingual Swedish Finnish children and their monolingual Swedish peers. The Swedish Finnish migrant children have Finnish as their first language and Swedish as their second language and the monolingual children are native speakers of Swedish.

The main focus of the contrastive analysis is on the differences of the Finnish and Swedish discourse of the bilingual Swedish Finnish children. The study focuses on two specific discourse features: the use and distribution of various politeness strategies and the use of downgraders. A similar comparison is done between the Swedish discourse of the bilingual Swedish Finnish children and the native speakers of Swedish.

The study of politeness strategies is based on the models of Brown & Levinson (1978) and Scollon & Scollon (1982). The downgraders have been categorized and analysed on the basis of studies by House & Kasper (1981) and Janet Holmes (1982, 1984).

Material

The material consists of twelve dialogues in Finnish between the bilingual Finnish Swedish school children and six conversations in Swedish between them and their Swedish counterparts.

The dialogues were recorded in the Botkyrka and Upplands-Väsby schools in Stockholm in February 1987. They were task-oriented simulated conversations

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where the participants were asked to solve a (potential) conflict by discussing the matter with each other. The topics were planned so that the children would not have difficulties orientating themselves to the situations. Consequently, the conversations could have taken place in reality.

The Finnish Swedish migrant children who participated in the study have lived in Sweden most of their lives. They speak Finnish with their parents and Swedish with their friends and a majority of them is considered successively bilingual. At the time of the recordings they attended the ninth grade of one of the two schools. The participants in each dialogue knew each other fairly well, so there was little distance (-D) between them and no difference in power (-P).

Methods

The data is analysed in terms of the distribution of various politeness strategies and the use of downgraders. The study of the politeness strategies is based on the theories of Brown & Levinson (1987) and Scollon & Scollon (1983). According to Brown & Levinson, we use various politeness strategies, most commonly positive, bald on-record, negative and off-record strategies to save face in a conflict situation.

Positive politeness (referred to as solidarity politeness by Scollon & Scollon) involves an intimate conversation style between friends, ie. between people with no or little distance or asymmetry in power (-P-D). Bald-on-record strategies are used when the speaker has least fear of losing face and s/he can then adopt a very direct manner of addressing the hearer. As in the case of positive politeness strategies also here the power and distance relationship is -P-D.

Negative politeness strategies and off record strategies are applicable when there is an increasing distance between the speakers and the hearer (the situation is -P+D).

Downgraders have been studied by House & Kasper (1981) and Holmes (1982, 1984). House & Kasper refer to downgraders as modality markers, which are meant to tone down the effect of an utterance. They include such categories as *hedges* (*kind of, sort of, somehow,* etc.), *understaters* (*a little bit, not very much,* etc.),

downtoners (*possibly, perhaps, rather*, etc.) and *non-committers* (*I think, I guess, I suppose*, etc.).

Results of the study of politeness strategies

The study of the use of politeness strategies reveals that there are great differences between the Finnish and Swedish discourse of the Finnish Swedish subjects. The Finnish dialogues are dominated by positive politeness strategies, the percentage being 55% of all strategies used in the data. The figure is in accordance with the symmetrical power relationship and the nonexistent distance between the participants. The situation is the same when the subjects switch to Swedish, but ten out of twelve participants use more negative strategies than they do in Finnish. In other words, when the bilingual children use Finnish they adopt more direct or solidary means of solving a problem and in Swedish they take more distance and discuss the matter with the help of a more indirect or hedged strategy. The average percentage of negative politeness strategies in the Swedish discourse is 29%, whereas the corresponding figure in the Finnish dialogues is 11%.

The highest frequency of positive politeness strategies is among the native Swedish speakers, their average percentage being 59.5%.

Figure 1. is a diagram showing the average figures of the distribution of various politeness strategies in the Finnish data.

Results of the study of downgraders

The contrastive analysis of the use of downgraders shows again that the most striking differences between the three groups are those of the Swedish Finnish children's conversations in Finnish and Swedish. The relative amount of downgraders, ie. the number of downgraders in relation to the amount of speech, is higher in the Swedish dialogues than in the Finnish ones. Nine of twelve Swedish Finnish pupils show a higher amount of downgraders in Swedish than in Finnish. The average percentages in the use of downgraders are

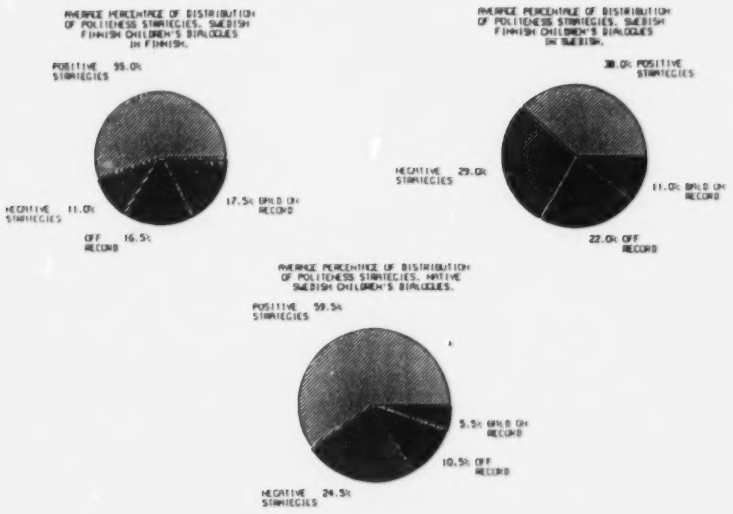
AVERAGE PERCENTAGE OF DISTRIBUTION OF POLITENESS STRATEGIES. SWEDISH FINNISH CHILDREN'S DIALOGUES IN FINNISH.
POSITIVE STRATEGIES 55.0%
17.5% BALD ON RECORD
NEGATIVE STRATEGIES 11.0%
OFF RECORD 16.5%
AVERAGE PERCENTAGE OF DISTRIBUTION OF POLITENESS STRATEGIES. SWEDISH FINNISH CHILDREN'S DIALOGUES IN SWEDISH.
POSITIVE STRATEGIES
NEGATIVE STRATEGIES 29.0%
11.0% BALD ON RECORD
22.0% OFF RECORD
AVERAGE PERCENTAGE OF DISTRIBUTION OF POLITENESS STRATEGIES. NATIVE SWEDISH CHILDREN'S DIALOGUES.
POSITIVE STRATEGIES 59.5%
5.5% BALD ON RECORD
10.5% OFF RECORD
NEGATIVE STRATEGIES 24.5%

Figure 1. A diagram showing the average figures of the distribution of various politeness strategies in the discourse of the bilingual Swedish Finnish children and the native Swedish children.

6.8% in Finnish and 9.9% in Swedish, and, respectively, 8.7% in the discourse of the native Swedish speakers.

The relative amount of downgraders produced by each speaker is shown in the diagram next page. In this diagram we can compare the figures in Finnish and Swedish. Nine out of twelve children use more downgraders in Swedish than in Finnish. The result supports Holmes' theory on the connection between negative politeness markers and downgraders. As the typical mode of expressing deference and tact towards the hearer is the use of downgraders it is not surprising that the Swedish dialogues, which include many negative politeness strategies, also show a high level of downgraders. See also Figure 2.

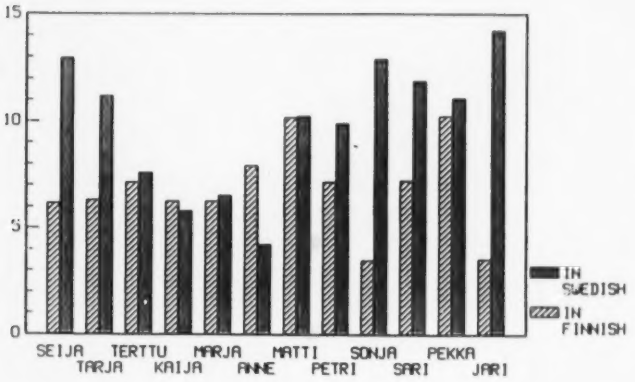

Figure 2. Relative number of downgraders in the Swedish Finnish children's discourse.